

Bhutan

Strange Hill Folk & Their Enchanted Land

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THROUGHOUT the long extended width of the Himalayas between the Indus and the Brahmaputra there is no country so remarkable for the grandeur of its natural features as Bhutan.

Its lofty mountains, enclosing deep and precipitous gorges, the natural stairways from the plains of the Duars to the edge of the Tibetan plateau, are clothed with vegetation to their very summits. Deep dark forests of pines and firs reach nearly to the snow line. Below them, but still at an elevation of 8,000 to 9,000 feet, are oaks and many coloured rhododendrons. In the lower depths of the many valleys formed by the rushing torrents cutting their cliff-bound way to the Brahmaputra is a sub-tropical vegetation. A glorious tangle of bamboo forest, thick with undergrowth, may be strewn with the graceful fronds of gigantic tree ferns, and in the gloomy depths of the intersecting waterways most gorgeous butterflies make brilliant star patterns in the humid atmosphere. It is an enchanted land, almost fantastic in its endless variety and anomalous scenery.

High above the Himalayan spurs, of which rank after rank constitute the chief geographical features of Bhutan, are the glittering snows of Tibet.

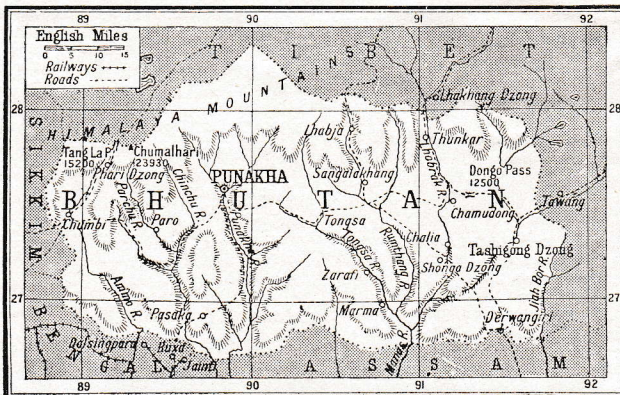
Standing midway, it is possible to scan the beauty of these lofty

snow-clad peaks, and at the same time to look downwards into the depths of almost tropical scenery. I have seen a bamboo forest in an upland valley under snow, with the laden stems curved and entangled into one gigantic pattern of lacework of inconceivable beauty.

But progress along the paths and byways which are the roads of Bhutan is not all joy. Countless biting and stinging insects are in the air, and under the humid influence of the rains every wayside leaf is the "jumping off" opportunity for a watchful leech. It is impossible to avoid these pests, for they exist in myriads, and they attack men and animals alike with equal bloodthirstiness and often with disastrous effect.

The political value of Bhutan to the Indian Government is chiefly centred in its service as a stepping-stone to the high altitudes of Tibet. Formerly the spasmodic efforts of the Indian Government to cultivate friendly relations with Lhasa were directed along the difficult routes which traverse Bhutan and emerge on to the Tibetan plateau, after winding upward along the slopes of the great spurs which form the slippery ramps from the plains.

The two routes which have historically been most frequently made use of are those of Buxa, in the west, and Derwangiri, in the east. The Buxa route is still regarded as



THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF BHUTAN



BHUTAN: PRIESTLY GLORY OF ITS SPIRITUAL CHIEF

The Deb Raja, acting head of the Buddhist Church in Bhutan. His religious objects are of gold and silver, finely embossed, and the fabrics of richest silks and tapestries



SIMPLE HABITS OF THE FAMILY OF BHUTAN'S SECOND CHIEF MAN

The Thimbu Jongpen, Governor of the summer capital, might have been king of Bhutan. He was supported by the Chinese, but the Maharaja had the stronger army, and the Jongpen was content to ally himself with the Maharaja by marrying his sister. Here we see his family in the simple yet picturesque everyday costume of the Himalayan hill state

Photo, John Claude White

the main highway into Bhutan. It runs as directly as any Himalayan route can run to Punakha, the chief town of the country and the seat of government. A certain amount of traffic passes from Tibet to Assam through Punakha, there being very little local trade; what there is—chiefly coarse blankets, cotton cloths, leather, and ironwork—being required for home consumption.

The Derwangiri route will never be important. It is true that by following the valley of the Manás, the chief river of Bhutan, it offers an opportunity for development in the distant future which may prove to be better than any other for a direct road to Lhasa, the upper affluents of the Manás being now known to drain from the neighbourhood of the great Tibetan lake, Yamdok Tso; but very little is as yet known about the northern borderland of Bhutan.

The same may be said of a recognized central trade route which connects the Tibetan town of Chetang with Assam, passing the Bhutanese trade

mart of Tawang. All we know is that there are at least four considerable passes between Chetang and Tawang, and that Tawang itself is unapproachable on account of the fierce hostility of its barbarous guardians. Even this much information has been obtained with difficulty by native explorers—one of whom did actually reach Tawang from Tibet, but was not able to pass that place southwards.

The Bhutias, as we know them, the people of Western Bhutan, are undoubtedly Tibetan in origin. Some two centuries ago all Western Bhutan was occupied by a people known as Tephu, who were probably tribal offshoots of Cooch Behar, but an irruption of Tibetan soldiers displaced them, and Tibetans have occupied the country ever since.

As might be expected, the better class of Bhutias are very Tibetan in character and general intelligence. Their houses and monasteries are well built and exceedingly picturesque. They are most excellent joiners and workers



TONGSA WOMEN OF THE MAHARAJA'S PALACE

They are his serving-women, dressed in the ancient costumes of Bhutan, with finer embroideries than are now worn, and deeply-fringed scarves used as sashes. But in their heavy, barbaric faces of the Tibetan type, the women contrast badly with the men. As in Tibet, when they marry a man, his younger brothers also become their husbands

Photo, John Claude White

in wood, some of the carved trellis work with which they delight to adorn their Swiss-looking dwellings being as remarkable as the ingenuity with which they fit those dwellings to apparently impossible sites. They are hospitable and friendly enough if properly approached, but the Eden Mission of 1863 experienced a very rough side to their character when the political object of

the Mission was unwelcome. They make the most of their scanty opportunities for agriculture and grow vegetables of excellent quality—especially turnips, which are as much a speciality in Bhutan as cabbages are in Kabul.

The government of the country was originally framed on Tibetan lines, with two Rajas, respectively known as the Dharm Raja, or religious head, and the



THE FIGHTING MAHARAJA OF BHUTAN AND HIS FAMILY

Thus clad in homely dress, with his daughters, grandson, and kinswomen, the warrior king, Sir Ugyen Wang Chuk, received a British Mission. His lack of pomp expressed friendliness for old comrades in the advance on Lhasa, which had been the triumph of his life. By breaking there all priestly intrigues he became the first king his country had for centuries

Photo, John Claude White

Deb Raja, or temporal authority. Neither of them were of any real significance in the administration. The Dharm Raja, as the incarnation of the Deity, was selected by the priests—the state religion being Buddhist—with the same pompous and absurd ritual as in Tibet. The Deb Raja, nominally elected by the council of permanent ministers, called the Lenehen, was

practically the nominee of one or other of the principal governors of either Eastern or Western Bhutan.

Towards the end of the last century there was practically no government at all, and "might" was the only "right" recognized; but since the abortive Eden Mission in 1863, which was a political effort to obtain reparation for constant aggression and

BHUTAN'S ENCHANTED LAND

outrages by Bhutia officials on the frontier, followed by a military expedition which occupied Buxa and Derwangiri, a better form of administration has gradually been evolved, resulting in the chief power being now vested in a nominally subordinate official called the Tongsa Penlop.

In 1903-4 the Tongsa Penlop accompanied the British Mission to Lhasa, on which Mr. Claude White, our Sikkim Resident, was joint commissioner, and a great friendship was formed between the two men. The Tongsa Penlop was able to render valuable services to the British Govern-

ment. These were recognized by a knighthood, the order of which was conveyed to him by White, and formal relations were finally established between the two Governments. Since then the Duars, or lowlands, of Bhutan, which had been ceded to the Indian Government at the close of the campaign of 1864, have "settled down into peaceful and prosperous British districts."

There is little to record in the history of Bhutan previous to the campaign. Efforts were made to establish friendly relations with that country as early as 1773, after the Bhutias had been



SOME OF THE LESSER POTENTATES OF STRUGGLING BHUTAN

Most of these ministers are men whom the king defeated or won over in a long struggle to master and reorganize the country. The man with the mitre-shaped hat is the Paro Penlop, or Governor of Paro town, his official staff being held by the retainer behind him. Around and beneath him is displayed some of the fine work of Bhutanese craftsmen

Photo, John Claude White



LAMAS AND NOVICES OF THE TONGSA LAMASERY

Bhutan is almost as priest-ridden a country as Tibet. Its innumerable monks, or lamas, who combine ancient devil worship with degraded Buddhism, sap the masculine strength of the nation, and try to rule it. But fighting men, like the present Maharaja, outplay the chief lamas, and occasionally break the army of the Tibetan Grand Lama, and so save the people

Photo John Claude White

driven out of the Cooch Behar dependency of Bengal, when George Bogle, a Bengal civilian, was deputed by Warren Hastings to visit the capitals of Bhutan and Tibet. Bogle was an ideal envoy, but his successful efforts were ignored in India, and the seeds of a good understanding were never allowed to mature. Turner's

mission in 1784 was unsuccessful, and it was not till nearly a century later that any further official attempt was made to open up friendly intercourse with Bhutan again

The Manás has been referred to as the chief river of Bhutan, but there are minor streams innumerable which break downwards in torrents to the

BHUTAN'S ENCHANTED LAND

Brahmaputra from the main divide of Northern Bhutan. These central streams are very little known. On the west there are two rivers, the Teesta and the Chinchu, both of which are important in connexion with the routes traversing Bhutan to Lhasa.

An affluent of the Chinchu, called the Parchu, leads upward to the dividing line between Bhutan and Tibet from Paro, the capital of Western Bhutan. From the pass the road drops to Phari Dzong, which was a position—"abundantly bare, bleak, and inhospitable," according to Bogle—occupied by our troops with the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa in 1904, and was again a halting place of importance in the expedition to Mount Everest.

Phari Dzong (or fort) is thus a geographical objective on either route

to Lhasa. At an elevation of 14,200 feet above sea level, it is still well below the main water parting to the north of it, where the Tang La pass (15,700 feet) marks the passage across the real backbone of the Himalayas, almost under the shadow of the giant Chumalhari peak, the landmark of all the Eastern Himalayas.

Physically, the Bhutias are a fine race of people, but they are, like the Tibetans, exceedingly dirty in their persons and their habits. A loose woollen coat reaching to the knees, with a waistband of some rough material, is the dress of the men, and that of the women differs from it only in being longer and possessing loose sleeves. They are a cheery race, in spite of the strenuous lives they lead and the labour involved in the building and upkeep of their narrow-terraced fields, cut out of the hillside and revetted with infinite care.

Their religion is the ordinary form of debased Buddhism which is to be found anywhere in the Himalayas, consisting of incantations and the propitiation of evil spirits.

It is wrong to include all Bhutan humanity under one Tibetan type. There are in Eastern Bhutan people, of whom we know exceedingly little, but who have come under the observation of our native explorers, of a distinct type. They are probably affiliated to the mixed tribes of the Assamese border, the Mishmis, Abors, etc., with whom they are more or less geographically associated.

The hills and forests of Bhutan hold many problems in their depths which are still unsolved, and of all the infinite variety of trans-frontier propositions which still face the geographical explorer that of Bhutan is, perhaps, the most difficult



GORGEOUS ABORIGINAL OF THE HIMALAYAS

He is a Lepcha of Bhutan, one of only 6,000 people of the highland forests and jungles. Probably out of wages as servant to a European he has purchased his embroidered raiment and curiously sheathed sword

UNKNOWN BHUTAN

A Himalayan Wonderland



A kingly king is Sir Ugyen of Bhutan when crowned thus and arrayed in his vivid national dress and glittering Order of the Indian Empire

Photos on pages 417 to 431 by John Claude White



Bhutan's Royal Family at home. Though their straight hair and Mongoloid features are unlovely in Western eyes, the Royal ladies have an air both pleasant and refined. Their heavy necklaces are remarkable



For sheer theatricality in their Oriental setting, the garish colouring of the gorgeous dresses, and the weird accompanying music of the temple band, the religious dances of the lamas are inimitable



Despite his disfiguring goitre, the Tango Lama seemed complacency incarnate as he posed in the carved portal of his monastery at Talo



The King with his councillors in their crimson shawls of office. How the grotesque runs riot in Bhutanese art this wall fresco demonstrates



His Majesty's Lifeguards are gorgeous fellows, wearing rich brocade, yellow scarfs, and steel helmets swathed with twists of coloured silk. They carry metal-bossed targets and swords in silver sheaths



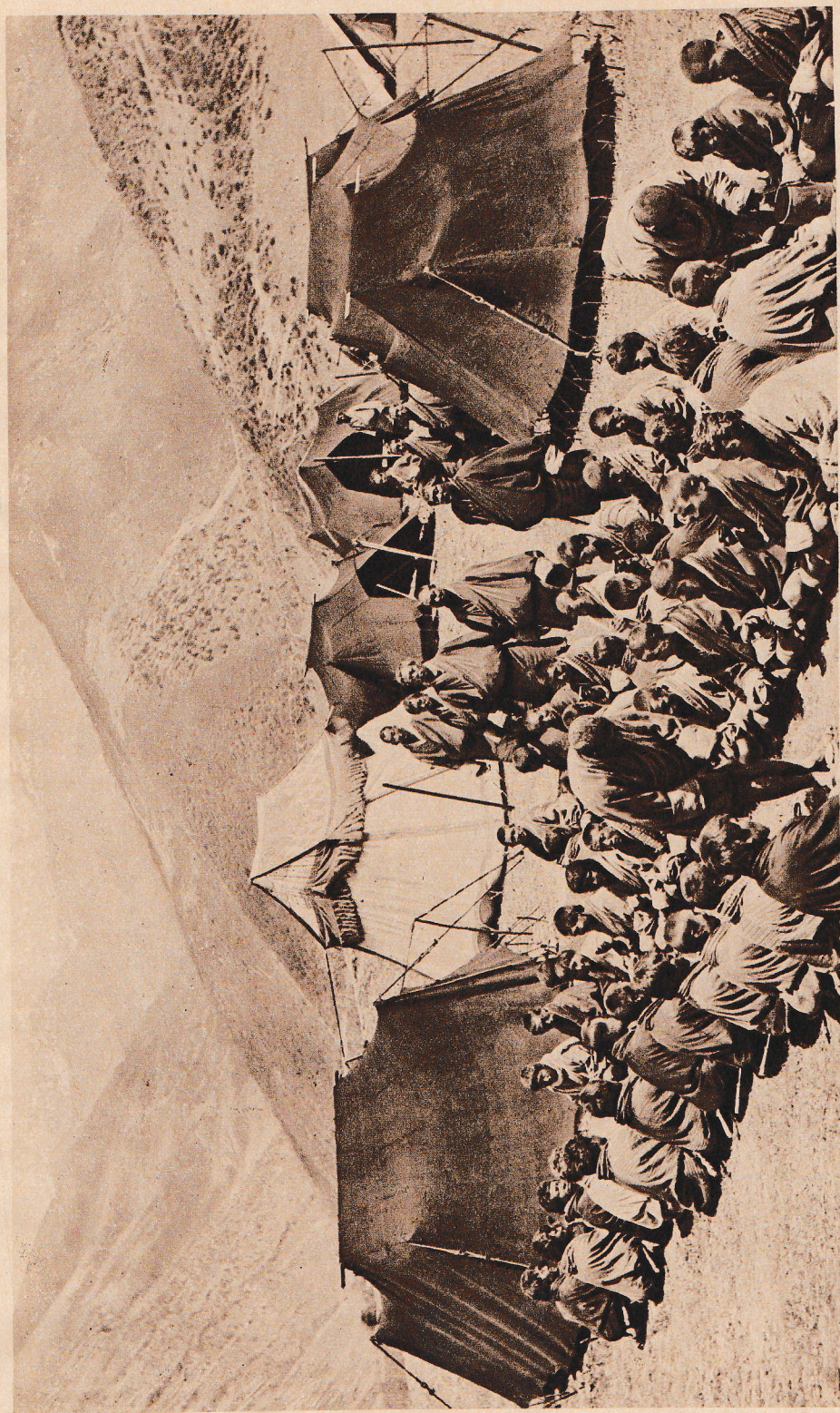
Picked musicians from the King's private band, trumpeters dressed in red, drummer and gong-striker in green. Bare-legged syces lead, riding mules half hidden under magnificent saddle-cloths



Phari Dzong, the finest fort. These majestically towering buildings and projecting roofs are super-Swiss in their architecture



Typically Bhutanese is the massive timberwork of this court in the King's palace. The troughs are royal baths, used medicinally only



Bhutan is a land of contrasts, where one can stand above the snow-line and look down into depths of tropical scenery. This party, halted for dinner, was at Lingzi, 15,000 feet up among the Himalayas



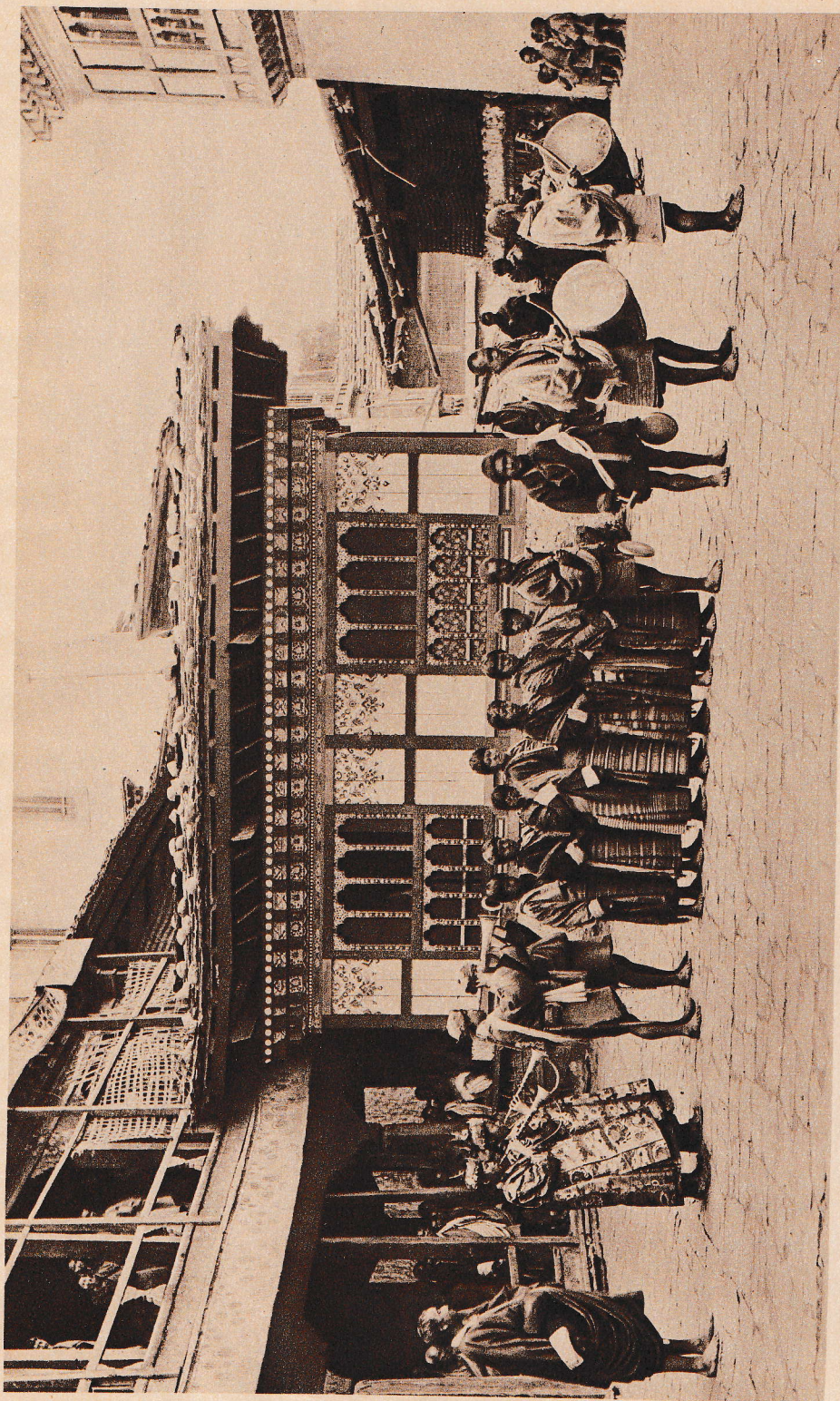
*Friendly simplicity marks the Bhutanese when their suspicion is not aroused. A thousand of them—
Maharaja, councillors, and retainers—gathered here to see a magic-lantern display by a British Mission*



Zigzag steps skirting crannied walls give cautious admission to the spacious courts and Swiss-like chalets of Bhutan's fortress palaces



Buddhist vestments are of incredible richness and priceless value: witness the brodered cope and graven mitre of the Avatar of Thaling



A procession of the King's music is fantastically picturesque. Drummers in green "bokus" precede singing girls in gaudy draperies, and trumpeters in stiff crimson brocades bring up the rear



When performing a devil dance the castle lamas wear papier mâché masks admirably moulded to represent animals' and demons' heads. The dresses, Chinese brocades of every imaginable hue, are of great value and antiquity



Mullahs in the making pose, in gaudy and variegated raiment, in the panelled lecture rooms of one of Bokhara's many fine mosques

Photo, Maynard Owen Williams